What Works Clearinghouse

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

Dropout Prevention April 16, 2007

High School Redirection

Program description

High School Redirection is an alternative high school program for youth considered at risk of dropping out. The program emphasizes basic skills development (with a particular focus on reading skills) and offers limited extra-curricular activities. The schools operate in economically disadvantaged areas and serve students who have dropped out in the past, who are teen parents, who have poor test scores, or who are over-age for their grade. To foster a sense of community, the schools are small and teachers are encouraged to act as mentors as well as instructors.

Research

Two studies of *High School Redirection* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards and one study met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The three randomized controlled trials included more than 1,600 students in Stockton, California; Wichita, Kansas; and Cincinnati, Ohio.[1]

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *High School Redirection* to be moderate to large for staying in school, for progressing in school, and for completing school.

Effectiveness

High School Redirection was found to have mixed effects on staying in school, potentially positive effects on progressing in school, and no discernible effects on completing school.

	Staying in school	*Progressing in school*	*Completing school*
Rating of effectiveness	Mixed effects	Potentially positive effects	No discernible effects
Improvement index[2]	Average: +6 percentile points Range: –5 to +20 percentile points	Average: +4 percentile points Range: –3 to +10 percentile points	Average: +4 percentile points Range: –1 to +8 percentile points

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

Absence of conflict of interest

The *High School Redirection* study that this intervention report summarizes was prepared by staff of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR). The principal investigator for the WWC dropout prevention review is an MPR staff member and was the lead author of the *High School Redirection* study. For this reason, the study was rated by staff members from Caliber, an ICF International Company, who also prepared the intervention report. The report was then reviewed by MPR staff members, as well as members of the WWC Technical Review Team and external peer reviewers.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

High School Redirection is no longer an active program and no current developer or contact information is available. Additional information about the program model and the implementation experience of districts that have used it can be found in the Baker and Weinbaum (1991) and Rubenstein (1995) reports listed in the "References" section of this report.

Scope of use

The original *High School Redirection* opened in 1968 as an alternative high school and was operated by the New York City public school system until it closed in 2004. In 1987, the U.S. Department of Labor launched the *Alternative Schools Demonstration Program* (ASDP), which replicated the *High School Redirection* model in seven urban school districts in six states. Because of budget pressures, shifting district priorities, and other factors, these ASDP evaluation schools have all since closed or are no longer following the *High School Redirection* model. Although these programs have ended, *High School Redirection's* core features—small size, access to child care, and emphasis on academic remediation and accelerated credit accumulation—are shared with many alternative high school programs currently operating throughout the country.

Description of intervention

High School Redirection is an alternative high school model for youth who are at high risk of not completing school. The program emphasizes basic skill development and offers an intensive remedial reading program, Strategies and Techniques for Advancement in Reading (STAR), for students with serious literacy problems. In many cases, the schools offer opportunities for independent study and accelerated credit accumulation, so that students who have fallen behind can make quick progress toward graduation. Beyond the emphasis on basic reading skills, the program model does not require specific curriculum elements; the schools generally follow the standard curriculum offered by their school district. To help create a sense of community, schools are relatively small—typically with no more than 500 students. Teachers are encouraged to act as mentors as well as instructors and classes are kept small to allow for more individualized attention. The program model calls for on-site child care and limited extracurricular activities. The schools issue standard high school diplomas, operate in low-income areas separate from other high schools, and maintain a degree of autonomy from the local school district in day-to-day policy-making and staff selection. The schools target former dropouts, teen parents, those who are over-age for their grade, and students with low test scores.

Cost

The cost of *High School Redirection* per student per year of program participation was estimated to be $3,455 in Cincinnati and $1,067 in Wichita.[3] These estimates represent the additional cost of the program beyond the cost per year of educating the student in a regular school within the district, which was estimated to be $7,256 and $5,686, respectively. No information is available for Stockton.

3. See Weinbaum, A. T., & Baker, A. M. (1991). Costs have been converted to 2006 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

Research

Five studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effectiveness of *High School Redirection.* Three studies were included within one research report (Dynarski & Wood, 1997). This report summarized findings on the effectiveness of the replications of *High School Redirection* sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor as part of the ASDP evaluation. Two of the Dynarski and Wood (1997) studies—those conducted in Wichita, Kansas, and Cincinnati, Ohio—met WWC evidence standards. A third—conducted in Stockton, California—met evidence standards with reservations. The Stockton study received a lower rating because a substantial number of control group students enrolled in the intervention school.[4] The remaining two studies of *High School Redirection* did not meet WWC evidence screens.

The Dynarski and Wood (1997) studies in Stockton, Wichita, and Cincinnati were all randomized controlled trials in which applicants to the alternative school were assigned either to the intervention group, who were offered admission to the school, or to a control group, who were not. The Stockton study included 374 youth who applied to enter the program for the 1991–92 school year; the Wichita study included 358 applicants for the 1991–92 and 1992–93 school years; and the Cincinnati study included 902 applicants for the 1993–94 and 1994–95 school years.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.[5]

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *High School Redirection* to be moderate to large for staying in school, for progressing in school, and for completing school.

Effectiveness

Findings

The WWC review of interventions for dropout prevention addresses student outcomes in three domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school.

Staying in school. One study of *High School Redirection* showed statistically significant effects on staying in school. The Stockton study indicated that *High School Redirection* youth were enrolled 39 more days on average in the first follow-up year than control group youth (110 days versus 71 days) and 17 more days on average in the second follow-up year (67 days versus 50 days). In addition, at the end of the third follow-up year, fewer *High School Redirection* youth had dropped out (43% versus 53%).[6] The other two studies showed no statistically significant or substantively important effects of *High School Redirection* on staying in school.

Progressing in school. The Stockton study found that, at the end of the fourth follow-up year, *High School Redirection* youth had, on average, earned more credits toward graduation than control group youth—10.5 versus 8.5 credits—a difference that was statistically significant. The Wichita study found no statistically significant effect on total credits earned. The Cincinnati study did not examine outcomes associated with progressing in school.

Completing school. The Stockton study found that, by the end of the third follow-up year, *High School Redirection* youth were more likely than control group youth to have completed high school or earned a GED certificate—40% versus 32%—a difference that was not statistically significant. The Wichita and Cincinnati studies found no difference between the research groups in completing school at the end of the second follow-up year.[7]

4. Since some Stockton control group students attended the intervention school, the estimated effects of *High School Redirection* from the Stockton study are somewhat understated.
5. The Extent of Evidence Categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.
6. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.10 level but not at the 0.05 level, the standard used for statistical significance by the WWC.
7. The Cincinnati study did find that *High School Redirection* had a small, statistically significant positive effect on receiving a high school diploma; however, the intervention did not have a significant effect on the combined outcome of receiving either a high school diploma or a GED certificate.

Effectiveness *(continued)*

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as: positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings,[8] the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the WWC Intervention Rating Scheme).

The WWC found *High School Redirection* to have mixed effects on staying in school, potentially positive effects on progressing in school, and no discernible effects on completing school

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analyses. The improvement index can take on values between –50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group.

The average improvement index for staying in school is +6 percentile points based on three studies, with a range of –5 to +20 percentile points across the findings. The average improvement index for progressing in school is +4 percentile points based on two studies, with a range of –3 to +10 percentile points across the findings. The average improvement index for completing school is +4 percentile points based on three studies, with a range of –1 to +8 percentile points across the findings.

Summary

The WWC reviewed five studies of the effectiveness of *High School Redirection.* Two studies met WWC standards, a third met evidence standards with reservations, and the other two did not meet WWC evidence screens. Based on the results from the three qualifying studies, the WWC found mixed effects on staying in school, potentially positive effects on progressing in school, and no discernible effects on completing school. The conclusions presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

References

Met WWC evidence standards

Wichita study

Dynarski, M., & Wood, R. (1997). *Helping high-risk youth: Results from the Alternative Schools Demonstration Program.* Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

Additional sources:

Weinbaum, A. T., & Baker, A. M. (1991). *Final implementation report: High School Redirection replication project.* New York: Academy for Educational Development.

Rubenstein, M. (1995). *Giving students a second chance: The evolution of the Alternative Schools Demonstration Program.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

Cincinnati study

Dynarski, M., & Wood, R. (1997). *Helping high-risk youth: Results from the Alternative Schools Demonstration Program.* Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

8. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation about the clustering correction, see the WWC Tutorial on Mismatch. See Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *High School Redirection,* no corrections for clustering were needed.

References *(continued)*

Additional sources:

Weinbaum, A. T., & Baker, A. M. (1991). *Final implementation report: High School Redirection replication project.* New York: Academy for Educational Development.

Rubenstein, M. (1995). *Giving students a second chance: The evolution of the Alternative Schools Demonstration Program.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

Met WWC evidence standards with reservations

Stockton study

Dynarski, M., & Wood, R. (1997). *Helping high-risk youth: Results from the Alternative Schools Demonstration Program.* Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

Did not meet WWC evidence screens

Baker, A. M. (1992). Using a theory of dropout prevention to determine the effectiveness of the High School Redirection replication program. *Dissertation Abstracts International 52*(08), 2761A. (UMI No. 9136351)[9]

Foley, E., & Crull, P. (1984). *Educating the at-risk adolescent: More lessons from alternative high schools. A report.* New York: Public Education Association.[9]

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the WWC *High School Redirection* Technical Appendices.

9. Does not use a strong causal design: the study did not use a comparison group.